

# Ashtead Independents

## NEWSLETTER



Issue 31  
November 2021

### GREEN BELT HOUSING THREAT REDUCED – BUT ERMYN FIELDS STILL UP FOR DEVELOPMENT

Having listened to residents' views, Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) has slashed the amount of green belt land being put up for housing development in the latest version of its local plan.

Most notably from an Ashtead perspective, out go proposals for building on the Leatherhead side of the M25 along Barnett Wood Lane, while some AONB classified land in Beare Green to the south of the district, has also been dropped. Also adjusted, but this time upwards, is the area far to the south in Hookwood near Gatwick – a proposal also supported by the Ashtead Residents' Association (ARA).

However, the plan retains the proposal to release Green Belt land for building at Ermyn Fields as well as on the 'Brownfield' site of the current Exxon Mobile office.

The latest version of the local plan is now out for consultation, and Ashtead Residents had until the 7th of November to comment. This is the second time the plan has been put out for consultation – this time under so-called "Regulation 19" – the first consultation "Regulation 18" was completed last year.

In terms of process, the big difference between the two drafts

of the plan is that the new draft takes into account the comments of those residents and organisations who commented on the first draft.

More importantly though, the second draft highlights those areas of green belt that were initially earmarked for housing development which have since been removed.

So what happened following the first consultation?

#### M25 Barnett Wood Lane

The reason why Barnett Wood Land by the M25 was deleted is because its Green Belt boundary had previously been assessed as 'performing significantly' when measured against the five tests or 'performances' that any part of the Green Belt boundary performs. Something your Councillors have been making the case for since 2017. That site is now scored 'significant' for 'merging' which means that the Green Belt, in its present form, prevents the merging of Leatherhead and Ashtead. And because it scored 'significant' it was deleted from the plan. Beare Green scored much lower on 'boundaries', but was excluded due to being within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

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### INDEPENDENT WINS DOMINATE MAY ELECTIONS

	Ind.	Con.	LibDem	Lab	Green	Total	% Ind.
<b>County Council (Chris Townsend)</b>	<b>2,908</b>	1,092	361	271	285	4,917	<b>59.0</b>
<b>Common Ward (David Hawksworth)</b>	<b>872</b>	262	125	118	No Cand.	1,377	<b>63.3</b>
<b>Park Ward (David Harper)</b>	<b>796</b>	404	110	67	79	1,456	<b>54.6</b>
<b>Village Ward (Mary Cooper)</b>	<b>1,215</b>	441	167	143	105	2,071	<b>58.7</b>

Ashtead again demonstrated its confidence in the ability of Ashtead Independent Councillors to represent them.

So a big thank you is forthcoming from the Ashtead Independent group whose four candidates up for election all secured substantial majorities.

The Independent Group's Constitution requires Members to be committed to engaging only in local issues, and to taking national party politics out of local government. It also recognises each Member as independent. There is no whip or common manifesto, and so Members vote according to their individual opinions – often based on years of experience in public, scientific or commercial service.

The Independents are always on the look-out for potential new candidates (for 2022 or 2023), members and supporters to help, especially with the more mundane tasks such as leafleting. So do get in touch with the Group if you would like to become involved and seek to ensure Ashtead remains Independent!

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## NEW GROUP SECURES FUTURE OF ASHTEAD YOUTH CENTRE

Ashtead Independent Councillors have formed a new group to take over the running of Ashtead Youth Centre from Surrey County and Mole Valley District councils.

Led by Ashtead's Independent SCC representative Chris Townsend who initiated the idea, and Village Ward MVDC councillor Mary Cooper, the Friends of Ashtead Youth Club have taken over responsibility for the Youth Club building in Barnett Wood Lane while also achieving charitable status.

Following Surrey's decision to stop many aspects of Youth work in the County, a number of youth centres, including Ashtead's were under threat of closure. But thanks to your local Independent representatives, local youth worker Richard Leary, parents Ian Parkinson and Glen Jordans and Gareth Evans from Rotary, the group negotiated with SCC over the past year to ensure the Centre remained open.

Taking on the building and responsibilities from SCC, who leased the building from Mole Valley District Council, has involved considerable work by the Group's members as they needed to make every aspect of the building safe and secure, not only for the young people attending, but for other organisations who might wish to use the building, including the long-standing resident Kidsclub.

The group is now working in partnership with the YMCA for youth work - and the Youth Centre is now open on a Thursday evening to two groups - one younger and one older group. A very positive reaction from those youngsters attending suggest numbers will increase as word of the new arrangements gets out.

Over time we intend to expand that provision as opportunities arise to other evenings and potentially weekends but that is for the future.

For now we are thankful that the Youth Centre is up and running following and providing opportunities for our local young people to mix with one another, learn and enjoy the facilities.



If you want to know more about the Youth Centre please email [YouthWork@aycfriends.org](mailto:YouthWork@aycfriends.org)

## ASHTEAD ALLEY CLEANING OUTFIT GETS NEW KIT

Ashtead's own alley cleaning 'army' of volunteers has new kit ready to head off into the paths and byways around the village.

With Covid stopping the advance of our intrepid volunteers in March of last year, the new gear has only recently been made available ready to start a programme of clear ups, following months of neglect thanks to the lockdown.

So, keep an eye open for the 'Ashtead Independent Alley Action Volunteers' snappily dressed in their new safety vests, caps, and with sign boards at the ready.

With local authority budgets being focused on only the essentials and clearing a lower priority, the Volunteers are helping fulfil a real need - to keep open our essential pathways and avoid them clogging up as nature takes over.



For those wishing to join our intrepid gang, then you should be aware that they meet once a month - usually on the first Saturday of the month for a couple of hours from 10am. The Team - now some 40 strong - is led by Mole Valley Village Ward councillor Alan Reilly who is usually joined by fellow Ashtead Independent Village Ward councillor Chris Hunt - the current chairman of MVDC.

So, if you want to join in the fun, and keep these important and often historic, pathways in tip-top condition, then call Alan on 01372 802489; he can then brief you on when the next clean up session becomes available. In term of time commitment, the group is looking for residents who can commit up to two hours a month.

The alley volunteers are a pretty relaxed bunch so there's few rules to think about and suggestions for targeting certain pathways are welcome. Nevertheless, volunteers need to take a practical approach and so turn up for clean-ups with the proper hand protection and footwear. Given there is no insurance to cover mishaps volunteers are asked to bring their own power tools and not to lend them out to others.

Given that garden waste is a hot topic in the district at the present time, you will be keen to know that all the waste is bagged up and removed every Monday or Tuesday by arrangement with Mole Valley District Council's waste disposal contractor Amey.

Given the national shortage of HGV licence holding drivers, if that becomes a problem in terms of collecting waste then volunteers will be stood down having been told in good time. Similarly, if the weather is looking tricky for any one of the clean-up days, then the general advice will be to stay at home.

## NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR SAFEGUARDING ASHTEAD'S HERITAGE

The key Government *National Planning Policy Framework* has provision for assets of local heritage importance to be recognized as "non-designated heritage assets" and taken note of when planning applications are being decided.

This is a separate category from the national listed building system maintained by Historic England.

Mole Valley has never had a list of non-designated sites, so Common Ward Independent Councillor David Hawksworth has been campaigning for action on this within the District for the last five years.

Now, Government funding has been released through the Build Back Better initiative to Surrey County Council to enable Local Heritage Listing to be started in some of the county's Districts, including Mole Valley.

This can include, in addition to buildings, features such as parks and gardens, statues, memorials, prehistoric trackways, banks and ditches – potentially almost anything with strong links to the past.

So David Hawksworth is encouraging residents to nominate assets for consideration for inclusion, ideally this month, but if the deadline is missed he understands that the plan is for MVDC to keep the list open and to issue revised lists annually in the future. He further stresses that as MVDC is the planning authority for the District, not the Surrey Council, all proposals made will be passed to it to decide what is and what is not included.

Forms for this purpose and further information on selection criteria can be found on the Surrey Council website at: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/land-planning-and-development/historical-planning/listproject>.

## FORGET BONFIRES - Look to MVDC to sort garden waste

The annoying failure in the Council garden waste bin collection was temporarily overcome by a single collection in October. It is not known when it will be possible to restart the monthly collections, but residents have received a letter from the Council explaining the situation, and stating that credits for missed collections will be applied next year.

Thankfully, most frustrated residents have not resorted to burning their garden waste. Common Ward Councillor and environmental scientist, Patricia Wiltshire, has pointed out that bonfires of garden plants release highly toxic particulates and volatile organic materials into the air. Tobacco smoke (a known causative of lung cancer) is from just one plant species, while garden waste consists of very many which release vast arrays of toxins. These are particularly harmful to both children and adults with respiratory problems.

Councillor Wiltshire asks that, until garden waste bin collection starts again, please compost as much material as possible, and continue checking Mole Valley District Council's website for information on collections, and on the Council Refuse Centres should you consider taking your waste to one of them yourself.

Should a neighbour's bonfire cause a nuisance, you can report this directly to the Environmental Health Team at MVDC and they have the authority to take action as appropriate.

## New planting promised for a more 'accessible' Ashtead Pond

Some years ago, the Council dredged Ashtead Pond, dumped the silt along the road-side edge, and planted it with an inappropriate mix of sedges, bulrushes, and willow. A thick mass of vegetation developed and this has constantly obscured the view for passers-by. Originally, some pretty plants, such as purple loosestrife and gypsywort, were included, but they were quickly eliminated by the aggressive vegetation.

Local people's enjoyment of the scene and the wildfowl has been frustrated by the persistent, thick, vegetation, as well as by netting which prevents anyone getting near to the water's edge.

Independent Councillor Patricia Wiltshire has worked tirelessly to improve the area and has managed, on several occasions, to get the bulrushes, sedges, and willows cut down to improve the view. She says it is unfortunate that not all of the original dredged dumped material can be removed, but it is planned to dig out the offending marginal vegetation and set pre-seeded pallets into the pond-edge over the remaining silt.

"The chosen plants are of native, attractive, unaggressive, insect-friendly, species. Let us hope that, by next summer, we will have a pretty and more accessible pond for everyone to enjoy", said Pat.



## MOLE VALLEY CHAIRMAN LAUNCHES NEW COMMUNITY CERTIFICATE

*"Having been used to pushing Ashtead's case via committee meetings for many years, I was reluctant to step back when asked to become Chairman – a role, that in any case, I felt was above my station.*

*"However, many councillors contacted me to try to get me to agree to be nominated, and I was honoured to be elected by the whole council as their Chairman in late May.*

*"The role of Chairman of Mole Valley District Council is the same role as a Mayor in a Borough Council. In taking up the role I remain a councillor and so can continue to pursue my stated aims of being able to help promote care of the environment, support those who improve the life chances of the disadvantaged, and those who promote community cohesion.*

*"As well as visiting projects, to encourage and recognise such work, I have launched a new initiative which I call it the Chairman's Certificate. The initiative aims to recognise the work that people do across the whole of the Mole Valley area and perhaps inspire others to do something as well. I am therefore inviting ward councillors in turn to nominate a local group in each category, in their wards, so that we can celebrate their achievements in supporting the community.*

*"As Covid restrictions have eased, I have been to a variety of events including the celebration of the 75th birthday of the charity which runs Alms Houses*

*around the country, including those in Ashtead. I have also visited a number of properties as part of the Heritage Open Days, opened a shop in Leatherhead and dedicated a large bench at Denbies.*

*"As well as chairing meetings of the full Council, I have also been on a sponsored walk for one of my nominated charities, Leatherhead-based Happy Child International, and am looking forward to officially open a facility for the Ashtead based charity ALDAG, which is my other nominated charity for the year.*

*"I have already met many wonderful people, and it is a great honour to be the Chairman of the Council. My wife, Alison, is my Consort and I would like to thank her for doing this, as well as my fellow councillors and of course Village Ward residents for their support. I only hope that I am performing the duties well.*

*"If you are involved in a local group in Ashtead and would like me to come to meet you, do please ask."*



**Chris**

Cllr. Chris Hunt  
Ashtead Independent  
Village Ward

## THREAT TO ASHTEAD VOTERS AS WARDS FACE CHANGE

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England periodically reviews and decides on local electoral systems, and now it is Mole Valley's turn. The last time this happened was in 1998.

It agrees the number of Councillors and the number and boundaries of

Wards. Each Ward should have a similar number of electors, who should have the opportunity to vote at every election.

With elections three out of four years, only in Wards with three Councillors can electors vote each time.

The District now has 41 Councillors and 21 Wards, with one councillor in seven Wards; two councillors in eight wards and six councillors in three wards, so some change is unavoidable.

If the Council continues with elections in three of four years, all Wards will need to have three Councillors.

The number of Councillors has to be divisible by three, implying 39 Councillors and just 13 Wards – combining and remodelling current Wards is inescapable.

Your Independent Councillors, with the Conservative Group, favoured all-out elections every four years, meaning smaller one-Councillor Wards.

Even our request for some consultation with residents on these options was refused by the Liberal Democrat majority, so the three of four year cycle continues, and they voted to reduce the Councillors to 39.

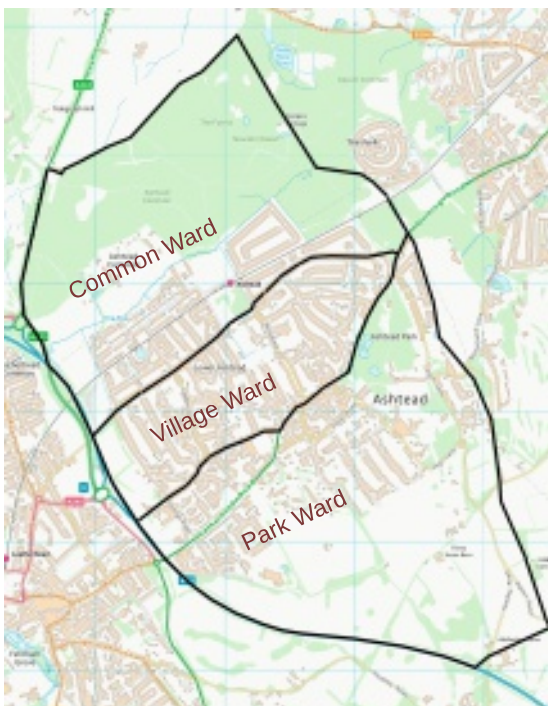
The Ashtead wards are now facing a possible major change, perhaps from three to two, and with six rather than seven Councillors – depending on how the boundaries are redrawn and if some adjacent areas are included.

A Cabinet Working Group, of which Ashtead Common Ward Independent David Hawsworth is a member, is developing a possible revised system of Wards to put before the Commission. However, any individual or organisation is free to make submissions directly to the Commission.

The warding pattern the Commission decides on will take effect at the May 2023 elections.

You can find the Commission at this address:

<https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/30046> or e-mail [reviews@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk)



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## Ermyrn Fields

Ermyrn Fields didn't score 'significant' in any performance of its Green Belt Boundary which means it remains an area proposed for development. Those thinking that the additional traffic might be a show stopper for development will be disappointed. The traffic analysis done on the impact of development on the junction at Leatherhead Road and Ermyrn Way was not felt to be significant enough to stop development. As anticipated, that analysis suggests that the amount of new housing that could be built at Ermyrn Fields, would make this 'bad' (level 4 to 5) but it would not make the congestion we all experience 'severe' as defined by Government's National Planning Policy Framework – the national blueprint for planning policies. Please feel free to still write to the Inspector concerning the congestion at the junction of the A24, Ermyrn Way and Grange Road, plus the concentration of housing development targeted at north Mole Valley which includes Ashtead.

Even if/when Ermyrn Fields are confirmed and released from the Green Belt, the developer has to meet many exacting demands on traffic and other policies. A planning application will need to be approved by Mole Valley. However, it's extremely unlikely that if a planning application fails, the land would return to within the Green Belt boundary and not be developed.

On a more positive note, the Ermyrn Fields development will deliver additional public access to green space, because the land owner has made available a large part of the neighbouring field which might be welcome for residents seeking an outdoor walk or picnic area etc.

Your Councillors had previously secured protection through a block woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO) to protect the entire ancient wooded boundary and its associated hedges on the north side of the site.

## Other sites

Apart from the Ermyrn Fields, there are other areas earmarked in the Plan for development, but not in the Green Belt. The largest is the redevelopment of the Exxon Mobile office – a Brown Field site. Other sites are Murrays Court, the Ashtead Library buildings and the grounds of the Leatherhead Hospital. The last two will have to continue to deliver community services as now but be redeveloped to provide housing in addition.

## Environmental impact

There are other changes to the original plan policies. Since

the first consultation, the Council has reviewed its policies on the type of housing that should be built and certain policies which go hand in hand with housing, such as biodiversity gains, and targets for the number of electric charging points. The policies on Heritage Assets and Natural Assets have been extensively revised which have the potential to provide enhanced protection for our historic and natural heritage, an area in which Councillors Hawksworth and Wiltshire have been particularly proactive.

## The next steps

Of course, not everyone is going to be happy with the new version of the plan. Those landowners, who thought they might be able to build on their Green Belt land and now find their sites excluded may well be disappointed. They do, however, have the opportunity to challenge this when the plan moves onto the next (post consultation) stage when the Planning Inspector gets involved in the process.

Councillor David Harper serves as the official Ashtead Independent member of the Planning Policy Working Group that has been working on the plan, with meetings most months over the last two years. But following a proposal of Councillor Hawksworth, all Councillors have been allowed to attend and participate in the discussion, with three to five of us present at most meetings. This has ensured Ashtead's concerns are heard and policies are fairly applied as the process proceeded.

David Harper points out that the Planning Inspector acts as a "judge" - someone who oversees a judicial review. All comments received since publication will be sent on to the Inspector by the Council, and the hearings will be in public at a date to be announced. He stresses that those who are concerned about the plan need to appreciate that the Council is not the main driver of housing targets; rather it is the Conservative run Central Government which controls the formula that generates the housing target numbers which the plan must be designed to deliver.

"Sadly", says David, "it is not within Local Government's power to challenge the result of the calculation. It can challenge the formula, but only by lobbying. The work of Local Government is to decide how or if it can meet the target, not what the target is."

Councillor Harper further pointed out that the revised Plan will still generate a number of new houses that will undershoot the target due to changes made since the first public consultation. "The reason for the undershooting (of the Government's targets) is the response to that consultation as so many residents objected to Green Belt being released. In response to our objections the council 'raised the bar' on qualifying areas and excluded more of them.

Thanks to the thorough process we went through when Ashtead Community Vision developed the Ashtead Neighbourhood Development Plan in 2016, many sites around Ashtead had previously been identified as 'performing' significantly in the tasks of the Green Belt which then led to them being excluded.

For more information read the Local Plan on the Mole Valley website, and do not hesitate to write in with your concerns to ensure they will be taken note of by the Inspector.

If you wish to discuss the above with your Councillors then please do so. Councillor Harper is particularly well-placed to help residents understand the decision-making process and is keen to explain where he can.

## Independents help get Green Lane right-of-way back on the map



Ashtead Independent councillors recently helped overturn the Surrey County Council Access Officer's 'opinion' in the fight to ensure the Green Lane rail crossing remains a public right of way.

The dispute over whether the crossing was a public right of way (RoW) came before Surrey County Council (SCC)'s Mole Valley Local Committee for decision on 29 September 2021. Its status had been contested repeatedly by railway companies since the 1900s.

Unfortunately, SCC's Countryside Access Officer argued that the 1966 Definitive Map showing the crossing as a Right of Way was an error as this conflicted with the Statement accompanying the Map - he proposed deletion of this as a public right of way.

Following intensive investigations and submissions prepared by Ashtead historian Brian Bouchard, supported by statements from Glynis Peterkin for the Ashtead Residents' Association, Peter J Williams (a user since 1983), and inputs to the debate from the Ashtead Independent Councillors on the Committee (David Hawksworth and Chris Townsend), SCC were instructed by a vote (12 for, 1 abstention) to not support the Access Officer's opinion, and to make an Order to revise the Statement to confirm the Right of Way status shown on the Definitive Map. The new wording will be finalised this month.

After the Order is published, there are six weeks for objections. If any are received, the matter goes to the Secretary of State for determination.

It was noted that despite our fears the Network Rail speaker stated they had no intention of closing the crossing.

## Ashtead Residents' Association

I was very honoured to be elected as the President of the Ashtead Residents' Association at the last AGM, particularly as I succeed my friends Blanche Douglass and David Mitchell-Baker.

During my time as an Independent Councillor on Mole Valley District Council I really valued the long-standing connection between the Association and Ashtead's Independent Councillors, and will do all I can to ensure that it continues.

Best wishes,

**Simon Ling**, President of the Ashtead Residents' Association

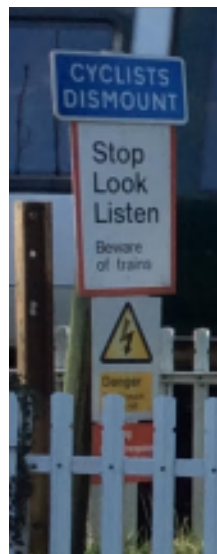
## DEALING WITH YOUR ISSUES

Ashtead Independent Councillors are elected to serve their residents in a number of ways across a range of issues. We represent your views as individual Members and also at Committee level.

The Independent Councillors actively scrutinise and challenge the actions of the Council Executive when they feel those decisions will impact residents.

Key issues currently involve reviewing the financial stability of the Council, ensuring services are maintained, and representing Planning concerns. So, if you are seeking funding for a project or general advice speak to your local Councillor.

Ashtead's Independent Councillors can be contacted via email/phone so do not hesitate to call. If we can't answer your question immediately, then we will investigate on your behalf and ensure a prompt response.



### Your Councillors:

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